

*Parades vs. Swades: an Analysis of South Asian American Gendered Ethnicity Formation in  
Visual Media Portrayals*

Honors Research Thesis

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## **ABSTRACT:**

As the number of South Asian Americans in the United States grows, so does their presence in mainstream American media, their production of alternative sources of Asian American film, and their cachet to develop Indian film industry (Bollywood) abroad. All three sources of media employ and depict South Asian Americans in various portrayals; some have been noted to perpetuate patterns of representation around ethnic identification, gender roles, citizenship, and socio-cultural ties. The consumption trends and effects these South Asian American portrayals have on South Asian American second-generation youth is largely unknown. The purpose of this study is to collect data concerning the media consumption patterns of our defined population of South Asian American youth, and how they negotiate gendered portrayals of their ethnic compatriots in their formation of ethnic identity. Using socialization theories and other data from previous ethnographies of South Asian Americans, we employ online surveys and personal interviews geared towards monitoring the consumption of South Asian American media portrayals and their effects on how South Asian American youth view themselves and their community. Findings of this study are among the first in the field of South Asian American Studies to indicate how South Asian American media portrayals affect the growing number of South Asian American youth, and how the pervasive growth of South Asian American media portrayals may be affecting the gendered ethnic identity formation of youth who consume these types of media.

## **PROLOGUE:**

This thesis is a joint project between undergraduate students Tanya Srivastava and I to complete our respective Honors Theses in Comparative Studies. From the conception of the research idea, to analyze South Asian American media portrayals, to the final acts of writing the paper, this project has indeed been a joint venture. Upon receiving permission from the Honors Arts and Sciences Advising office to proceed with a Joint Thesis, we approached the project with the understanding that while the paper would be jointly-authored, the actual Thesis Defense and submission would be separate; we have followed this plan successfully. Tanya and I both read and watched the important texts, films, and scholarly analyses used in our argument, and thus devised a theoretical framework together from our shared understandings of the media observed. From this basis, we developed a methodology to implement our study by jointly creating a survey and interview, and separately receiving IRB certification on our joint project. Data collection and analysis was similarly done together, and the actual writing of the paper was divided with Tanya writing the Methodology and Results section while I authored the Introduction, Theoretical Framework, and Conclusion. While our paper is divided in half by author, the project as a whole could not have happened without both of us participating.

## INTRODUCTION:

South Asian America has grown enormously in its visibility over the past decades, not only within the context of the United States, but also on a global stage. Indian Americans drive much of this population growth in being the third largest Asian American ethnic group, and being the largest Asian ethnic group in over twenty US states<sup>1</sup>. Preferential immigration policies for professionals and family reunification have allowed some South Asian Americans to proliferate spheres of influence within the United States professional job market and have made this group even more visible on a national scale for their rise in educational and economic achievement in a post-1965 United States of America. Even as South Asians were making inroads into the fabric of life in the USA however, their representation in visual media venues, most notably film and television, was severely underrepresented (or misrepresented<sup>2</sup>). Not just restricted to United States media, both Hollywood and Bollywood (Indian Hindi-language cinema) had few portrayals of South Asian Americans until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>3</sup>. Following a larger trend of Asian exclusion, most representations of South Asians in United States media have historically been in minor, stereotypical roles, sometimes portrayed by non-South Asian actors<sup>4</sup>. Mainstream Indian media has often presented stories that highlight the diasporic community, yet it was not until the late 1990's that storylines involving South Asian Americans became prominent, with their characterizations shifting from overwhelmingly negative to a more nuanced understanding of cultural citizenship and political identity of the Indian Diaspora<sup>5</sup>. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century marked an increase in the number of South Asian American representations across United States and Indian media, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> "Ameredia: South Asian Americans/Indian." Ameredia: South Asian Americans/Indian. Accessed April 11, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> "India Isn't: (Mis)Representations of India in the United States Media." *Samar*, Summer 1994, 4-9.

<sup>3</sup> Uberoi, P. "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32.2 (1998): 305.

<sup>4</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Uberoi, P. "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32.2 (1998): 307.

the rapid growth of the South Asian Diasporic film industry, spurred by filmmakers like Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta. The increase in portrayals of South Asian Americans led to greater access to media careers for South Asian Americans, as well as an increased distribution and influence of South Asian American cultural products and ideas, such as films, music, artwork, and online communities, across diverse populations.

Several foundational ethnographies of the lives and culture of second-generation Indian Americans have shown that portrayals of South Asian Americans, especially in regards to Bollywood and South Asian Diasporic Film, have been influential in shaping how Indian Americans understand ethno-religious identity, cultural citizenship, and familial issues<sup>6</sup>. Film critics and scholars alike also have analyzed many of these specific films that have gone on to be important cultural texts of a generation, and a variety of problematic representations of gendered ethnic identity have been raised against these media portrayals of South Asian Americans. In our study, we seek to explore how second-generation South Asian American youth (defined as between the ages of 18-29) inform their formation of their gendered ethnic identity in response to film and television portrayals of South Asian Americans in Bollywood, Hollywood, and South Asian Diasporic film, or films originating from South Asians living outside of the subcontinent with major themes focusing on issues of South Asian culture and identity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

### **Terminology**

Many of the terms used throughout this paper are based on the work of other scholars with backgrounds in Asian American Studies or South Asian Studies. Before exploring the

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<sup>6</sup> Shankar, Shalini. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. 172-173.

framework of ideas and arguments that led to our project, a list of terminology must be defined as to provide reader context of what this study hopes to show. Many of these will highlight the restrictions we had in outlining our target population, and the logic that went into those constraints.

*South Asian*: a demonym used to describe individuals and communities originating from and having cultural to ancestral ties to the geographic region of South Asia (defined in this study as the modern nation states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives). This constructed identity has gone by many names throughout history, such as Hindustani, Desi, Indian, etc, but we chose South Asian as a descriptor given its commonality in academic writings and American vernacular, and its inclusive nature of people who ascribe to a shared ethnic identity with others from the subcontinent yet are not from within the borders of the Republic of India<sup>7</sup>. At the outset of our study, we had specified that our research would only include Indian Americans as participants, but we modified this to South Asian American after receiving participation in our study from Pakistani & Sri Lankan Americans. We hope that the few results we have of non-Indian South Asian Americans do not appear as blasé or superficial tokenism on our part, but come from a desire to be inclusive of all who wished to participate in our study. That said we do also recognize the limitations of making claims for “South Asian Americans,” when the overwhelming majority of our study participants are in fact Indian American.

*American*: colloquially used in the United States of America to define materials, people, and abstract items related to a national identity of the nation-state, it is a term contested primarily among Latino American writers for its lack of inclusiveness of a broader, pan-American identity for the Western Hemisphere. In the context of this paper for simplicity’s sake

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<sup>7</sup> Mani, Bakirathi. *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012. 1-29.

however, the term “American” will be used primarily to refer to the United States of America, and a pan-American identity inclusive of Latin America would be specified as such.

*South Asian American:* more specifically than South Asian, South Asian American is an ethnic descriptor of a South Asian who holds some form of permanent residence in the United States of America. We do not discriminate between US citizens and non-US citizens in our target population, but do ask participants to note the length of their residence in the United States. Although the inclusion of South Asian Americans under the pan-ethnic racial category of Asian American is still a controversial issue in academic, advocacy, and community circles, we do consider this study to be part of a broader work of Asian American research. We limit the Asian Americans included in our survey to just South Asian Americans however as ethnographers have purported the unique ways South Asian American youth acquire and consume visual media in regards to the cinema of the subcontinent and transnational South Asian Diasporic cinema<sup>8</sup>. The recorded importance of these venues of cultural texts limit the scope of populations we can feasibly include in our study, as well as hinder some of the connections we could theorize across Asian American populations.

*Second-Generation:* as commonly defined in Asian American Studies, the second-generation are children of migrants to the United States who were born and spent the majority of their formative years of childhood and adolescence in America<sup>9</sup>. The so-called “1.5” generation, those born overseas but who have spent a significant portion of their life residing in the United States are for the purposes of this study grouped with the second-generation and simply called “second-generation.” These individuals must have moved to the USA before the age of twelve, or have spent an equivalent amount of time as a permanent resident of America

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<sup>8</sup> Shankar, Shalini. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. 85-86.

<sup>9</sup> Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. 25.

to be considered eligible for our study. Experience and understanding of mainstream American culture and race relations over an extended period of time is necessary for our study, and thus why we limit first-generation South Asian Americans, such as international students, from participating in our research.

*Youth:* the targeted age-range of this study is between 18 to 29 years of age, and this demographic was decided upon based on the work of South Asian American scholar Khyati Joshi. In her book on South Asian American ethno-religious affiliations, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground*, Joshi theorizes that after the lifting of immigration restrictions against Asians in 1965, the second-generation children born to the incoming waves of immigrants can be categorized into cultural cohorts based on their experiences with race and family unique to their time frame. Specifically she outlines characteristics of a "Second Generation A" and "Second Generation B," and posits that:

The Indian immigrants who parented Second Generation A are part of the larger post-1965 Asian immigrant cohort that resulted in the development of the "model minority myth" among Asians. The distinctions between Second Generations A and B is important as scholars build upon the present work and continue to consider the experiences of second-generation Indian Americans, and as practitioners set policies and combat presumptions about educational achievement. (Joshi 2006, 6)

Based on Joshi's heeding, we have modified her theory of the second-generation cohorts based on the common understanding of a generation being about twenty years in length, and citing key events in United States history to delineate how the South Asian American second-generation experience differed in socialization through changing racializations. Specifically, we consider for the purpose of this study that South Asian Americans born between 1965 and 1985 to be of Second Generation A, while those born from 1985-1996 as part of Second

Generation B (1996 being the last year at the time this study was conducted that would have produced individuals old enough to give consent to participating in the research). The cut-off point of 1985 is significant as not only is it neatly twenty years after 1965, but these would be the first individuals who would attend college after the 9/11 tragedy. The aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent trauma the South Asian American community underwent as perceptions and dialogue around South Asian American racial identity shifted provided a different collegiate socialization for the post-1985 second-generation, who also grew up in a world with almost no lived experience of the Cold War. How these generations relate to Indian cinema, the number of South Asian Americans present in American media, and the availability of South Asian American film also are noted by Joshi as important in shaping the differences between Second Generations A and B<sup>10</sup>.

*Gendered Ethnicity*: taken from a lens of Intersectionality, we include both gender and ethnic identifications as crucial in understanding how our target population constructs identity vis-à-vis their experiences with South Asian American media representations<sup>11</sup>. Scholars have noted the innately raced and gendered performances in several of the films applicable to our study, and thus we hope to prove that the gendered ethnicity as portrayed by South Asian Americans on screen does influence the gender & ethnicity formation of our research participants<sup>12</sup>. For sake of simplicity and constraints on the length of our survey/interview, we were unable to examine how sexual orientation also plays a part in how South Asian Americans negotiate media portrayals of themselves. We recognize this as a severely understudied and much needed question, but given our low participation from the LGBTQIA South Asian American community, making claims inclusive of LGBTQIA South Asian

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<sup>10</sup> Joshi, Khyati. *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race, and Ethnicity in Indian America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2006. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberle. *On Intersectionality The Seminal Essays*. New Press, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Mehrotra, M., and T. M. Calasanti. "The Family as a Site for Gendered Ethnic Identity Work Among Asian Indian Immigrants." *Journal of Family Issues* 31, no. 6 (2010): 778-807.



Americans may be unfounded for this study. It is pure conjecture however to assume that the majority of our research subjects are heterosexual, even among those who chose to identify as straight.

*Hollywood/American film & television*: this category of film refers to portrayals of South Asian Americans that are produced out of the film and television media of the United States of America. Specifically this applies to visual media products made through mainstream channels of production, and do not highlight South Asian American issues as the focus of the film or series. Some examples include *The Party*, *The Simpsons*, *Parks and Recreation*, and *New Girl*. Given the historical dearth of South Asian American media portrayals in mainstream American media and the cultural impact of American films set in South Asia, films such as *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and television series such as *Outsourced* may be considered relevant to this category.

*Bollywood*: this category of film refers to productions of the Hindi-film industry in India, specifically those produced out of Mumbai. Given the widespread availability and pan-South Asian appeal that many of these films carry, especially with South Asia's diaspora, we focus on Bollywood films at the expense of regional cinemas of India such as Tollywood, Mollywood, Kollywood, etc. A variety of Bollywood films feature Indian diasporic communities, and while our focus will be on those portraying South Asian Americans (such as *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, *Kabhi Alvida Na Khena*, *Pardees*, and *Dostana*), some other blockbuster Bollywood films set overseas (such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*) also are included as suitable sites of study.

*South Asian Diasporic Film*: more of a flexible category of film than the aforementioned two, Diasporic Film entails productions that highlight issues of the South Asian diaspora and primarily involve South Asians of the diaspora in their creation and production. The focus of

these will be once again on Diasporic Film about South Asian Americans such as *The Namesake*, *American Desi*, and *Mississippi Masala*, but British Asian films such as *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice* are included as relevant texts as well. Certain films and television series under this category such as *Monsoon Wedding*, *The Mindy Project*, and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* may be considered genre-bending films, and may be categorized in two of our media classifications.

### **Film Critique**

The central question for our project stems from the established body of work critiquing portrayals of South Asian Americans in various films across our defined genres of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Diasporic Film. It is from these critical understandings of how ethnicity, race, citizenship, and gender are played out on screen that we hope to derive some conclusions of how South Asian American youth are being influenced in their identity formation.

### **American Film and Television**

According to Edward Said, the American nation-state has inherited a long legacy of ideologies around race and cultural difference from the Orientalist tradition of Europe — something that extended perhaps as far back as the Hellenic and Persian conflicts of antiquity<sup>13</sup>. While Asians, including South Asians, have been a part of the history of the United States as far back as the 1700's, the first large waves of South Asian migrants paralleled the even larger migrations of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino migrants in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Economic motives and the formation of a White racial identity played a large part in the West Coast's racial hierarchy that excluded Asian migrants from resources, and some historians see the attitudes and policies enacted towards Asians during this time as

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<sup>13</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 77.

stemming from an Orientalist lineage<sup>14</sup>. Indian Civilization was on the forefront of many influential American minds such as Mark Twain and Ralph Waldo Emerson, but for all the Indophilic, Orientalist writings that America produced so too did it generate communities and policies that actively rejected the “Turban Tide<sup>15</sup>.” Several Asian migrants to America, such as Bhagat Singh Thind, a Punjabi American, and Takao Ozawa, a Japanese American, tried to legally protest their exclusion from citizenship and other restrictions by asserting their race as White; both appeals lost in a spectacular contradiction of the law that placed Whiteness and racial privilege as something related to skin color yet also not. In this midst of racial confusion for South Asians, a 1924 immigration law banned nearly all immigration from Asia to the United States until a major upheaval of immigration policy occurred nearly forty years later during the Civil Rights Era with the Immigration Act of 1965.

Although immigration from South Asia to the United States of America exponentially increased in the decades after 1965, the American film depictions of South Asians did not<sup>16</sup>. Even with South Asia accounting for a sixth of humanity and an ever-growing number of South Asians entering the United States, media access for South Asians or images of South Asia was limited—veritably a hold over of America’s exclusionary policies towards Asians. Of the earlier popular depictions of South Asians in Hollywood, such as 1939 black-and-white film *Gunga Din* and the 1960’s hit comedy *The Party*, many South Asian characters were played by White actors and actresses<sup>17</sup>. This nefarious practice of “brownface” has even continued up until the present when the number of South Asian American actors and roles are at an all time high, with films and series such as *Seinfeld*, *Short Circuit*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Prince of Persia*.

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<sup>14</sup> Lee, Shelley Sang-Hee. "Asians before Asian America." In *A New History of Asian America*, 5-26. New York: Routledge, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 1-19.

<sup>17</sup> "Racebending.com." Mike Le. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.racebending.com/v4/>.

Even as more South Asian actors were able to secure parts in Hollywood films however, the nature of the portrayals did not always improve.

The dialectic nature of Orientalism manifests itself in a variety of ways through American film representations of South Asians. Of the aforementioned films, *Gunga Din* is an excellent example of the “good Oriental/bad Oriental” dichotomy that has manifested in Chinese Hollywood characters as the archetypal figures of Charlie Chan and the Fu Manchu<sup>18</sup>. In the case of *Gunga Din*, the loyal, humorous (to the point of buffoonery), titular sidekick supports White patriarchy while simultaneously being aware and accepting of his lower status. The villain of this film, similar to the character Amrish Puri played in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, is the South Asian *thuggee*, a mystical, irrational, shrieking villain that poses a threat to White supremacy in its violent rebellion against it but ultimately proves impotent in its attempts to unseat the White man. While these specific film portrayals may be of South Asian characters in a South Asian context, the cultural effects of these representations have implications on the identity politics of South Asian Americans.

Shilpa Davé asserts in her book *Indian Accents* that the performance of “brown voice,” the auditory equivalent of “brownface” is a commonly employed tool of American film to mark South Asian otherness in American contexts, and to exacerbate the stereotype of South Asian Americans as being perpetually foreign, entirely Oriental and alien to the American context<sup>19</sup>. While the “brown skin” of South Asians has proven problematic in its location in the United States’ racial hierarchy, the “brown voice” provides a more useful means of identification of South Asians in Hollywood, both as a tool of othering, a racial marker, but also as a form of minstrelsy, perhaps highlighted best in the longest-running American television series’ Indian

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<sup>18</sup> Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. 102-103.

<sup>19</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 1.

character (and indeed one of the only South Asian American characters on American television before the 21<sup>st</sup> Century), Apu Nahasapeemapetilon<sup>20</sup>.

Perhaps the most other notable racial marker of South Asians played out in American visual media is the racialized model minority myth. One of the most pervasive and damaging of tropes for Asian Americans at large, the fixation of South Asians as inherently disposed to passivism, academic achievement, and economic success, continues to play out the dialectic, Orientalist qualities of the “good/bad Oriental.” Characters like Apu from *The Simpsons* or Rajesh from *The Big Bang Theory* present highly intelligent, overly-accented individuals who, in the case of the former had high educational merit in India that was translated to a pink-collar job eventually leading to middle-class success, and in the case of the latter had a professional career that has become a hallmark of South Asian-ness in America<sup>21</sup>. Another television show that, while being set in India, was in fact populated by a cast of South Asian Americans and British South Asians, depicted the flip side of the model minority through the controversial context of outsourcing jobs from America to India—hence the title of the series, *Outsourced*. Although the South Asian characters themselves were not particularly nefarious, social commentary on the subject matter of the show relates back to the images of “Yellow Peril,” or the “Turban Tide,” where the Oriental becomes a socio-economic threat to White hegemonic power structures. The model minority characters however, like Apu and Rajesh, are complicit in support of racist structures while fulfilling a façade of inclusion under neoliberal ideas of multiculturalism<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, a marked increase of South Asian American actors has been an apparent trend in American primetime television in the past decade, yet the model minority myth is still regularly played out on screen most commonly as Indian doctors and engineers,

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<sup>20</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 40-59

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 67-73.

<sup>22</sup> Mani, Bakirathi. *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012. 13-16.

apolitical figures that multicultural awareness yet never question the racist structures that produce their representations<sup>23</sup>.

A major facet of Said's theory of Orientalism is a gendered quality that reveals this dominating discourse to not only be racist, but also sexist. In the context of American media portrayals of South Asian Americans the aforesaid stereotypes are all coded in gendered term, in addition to working alongside separate dialectic representations of South Asian men and women in relation to race and power. While qualities such as "brown voice" and the model minority may seem asexual at first viewing, the coded power dynamics operating within their portrayals speak to how South Asian American men and women are depicted on screen. The theory of Orientalism suggests that White supremacist heteropatriarchy operates to "feminize" or "emasculate" the Eastern Other in the face of a virile, dynamic West<sup>24</sup>. From Hrundi Bakshi of *The Party* to Rajesh of *Big Bang Theory*, and even in children's programming with Baljeet from the animated series *Phineas and Ferb*, the "good" South Asian American male is one who is never a serious sexual competitor to the White male. Hrundi Bakshi, Rajesh, and Baljeet are marked as comedic relief first due to their otherness, which manifests itself in accent and cross-cultural faux pas, as well as the depiction of the character as sexually frustrated. Attempts at wooing the opposite gender are often met in spectacular comedic failure, or as gaining a close friend with a female as opposed to a sexual partner, implied to be the highest outcome of a relationship from the standard of the White heterosexual male hero.

At times the South Asian male may even display homoerotic or homosexual tendencies that affront the heteropatriarchy of White men, especially through the world-famous legacy of Indian cinematic dance. Dressing in colorful garb while sashaying hips to lively drum music is

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<sup>23</sup> Rastogi, Nina. "Aziz Ansari, Mindy Kaling, and the Sudden Rise of Indians on Television." *Slate Magazine*. N.p., June 2010. Web.

<sup>24</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 138.

portrayed as decidedly unmasculine, queering the role South Asian men play on screen to not fit the patriarchal binary of male and female (and perhaps mirroring the queer place South Asians occupy in the racial “binary” of America). For the villainous South Asian men in their various incarnations of *thuggee* or “Yellow Peril,” similar techniques are used to color the men as sexually substandard to White males; however, the reaction of comedy takes a lesser role to one of fear and disgust in the viewing of these South Asian men, a technique often achieved by coding Oriental masculinity with despotic violence and domination over women in comparison to an enlightened, rational West<sup>24</sup>. In this way the South Asian male villain may pose a perceived threat to the White man’s patriarchal hegemony over women, yet the queering question around the South Asian male’s sexuality serves to confuse and weaken his ability to resist the White man is cis-heteronormative film narratives. While the *thuggee* characters of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gunga Din* never have sustained relationship with women in the films to analyze this, the portrayal of South Asian American character Matthew Patel in *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* does. Matthew Patel harkens to the Fu Manchu trope of a mystical Oriental male replete with violent, repressive tendencies towards women and a particularly metro-sexual fashion sense that is coupled with a flying Bollywood-dance routine set to techno music to create a repository of almost every Orientalist image of the “bad Oriental” male. The all-American, all-White male lead of the film expresses his disgust and bewilderment at Matthew’s foreignness and then quickly beats him in a physical fight, demonstrating for viewers which masculinity is the better one.

The dialectic pair of Asian female representations in Hollywood mirrors the Charlie Chan/Gunga Din and Fu Manchu/Thuggee complex in what is often termed the “China Doll” and the “Dragon Lady.” Decidedly East Asian in focus, these terms do not entirely encapsulate how South Asian American women have been historically portrayed in

Hollywood—which is in fact very little. Until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there were almost no South Asian American female characters in Hollywood unless accompanied by a South Asian male character. American news media was perhaps the best source of visual media concerning South Asian women, almost always from South Asia, but even here it is possible to see how certain fundamental Orientalist principles shaped the portrayal of South Asian women in American film and television.

Akin to the passive, subservient Gunga Din figure, the oppressed South Asian woman came to the forefront of American imagination<sup>25</sup>. Women again were framed as the repositories of male power and privilege, and for the victimized South Asian woman, shouldering a repressive burden of her culture and male counterpart, rescue can be found in the embrace of a White man. The oppressed South Asian woman, as Gayatri Spivak argued in relation to colonial India, needed to be rescued through the discourse of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988, 297). Many news media images of South Asian women characterize their oppressed status with appearances that suggest a lack of hygiene and a physical barrier, often a veil, that obscures the identity of the woman<sup>25</sup>. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* does not afford much screen time to any South Asian women, but the few village women shown manifest this image of a victimized and backwards woman, only able to have their situation improve at the hands of a White male savior.

The rise of Indian beauty queens on an international stage, most notably in 1994 and 2000 when both Miss World and Miss Universe were won by Indian models, heralded a new era of hypersexualization of South Asian women in American media. While earlier forms of the repressed woman portrayal were often devoid of any notable sexual relationship outside of

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<sup>25</sup> "India Isn't: (Mis)Representations of India in the United States Media." *Samar*, Summer 1994, 4-9.



the gendered code of women being displayed as passive, the new South Asian woman was wantonly erotic and exotic<sup>26</sup>. Interestingly enough, the foreignness that makes the South Asian male undesirable as a sexual partner bolstered the sexuality of South Asian American women on screen, and soon American media outlets had South Asian women alongside mostly White males in sexual relationships. Television series such as *ER*, *New Girl*, *Outsourced*, and *The Good Wife* depict South Asian American women in supporting roles that often highlight conflict that arises when interracial relationships occurs<sup>27</sup>. Each of these portrayals conveys desirability for both White heterosexual men and South Asian women, usually at the expense of a South Asian man.

The representation of South Asian Americans in American visual media has increased at astounding levels in the past decade. From what was once a cinema almost entirely devoid of South Asian characters, with even less actors and actresses of South Asian descent being hired for said roles, has now become a media scene where South Asian Americans are perhaps overrepresented on screen. Many primetime television shows on air have South Asian Americans in supporting roles, a mix of actors and actresses, and one such actress and writer went on to produce her own show: *The Mindy Project*, the only television series in American history to be created and feature in the starring role a South Asian American<sup>28</sup>. Yet even with the visible increase of South Asian acting and writing talent in Hollywood, the nature of South Asian American portrayals is constantly shifting and remains problematic. Certain South Asian American actors, such as Aziz Ansari in *Parks and Recreation* or Kal Penn in *House MD* are characters whose stories are often devoid of any plot details that would indicate a South Asian heritage or go on to negotiate in the space of the show what it means to be a

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<sup>26</sup> Maira, Sunaina. *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia, Temple UP, 2002. 193.

<sup>27</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 155-156.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 157.

person of color. They often operate via the narrative of color blindness or race-neutrality and do not seriously engage with racism or the legacy of white supremacy. Alternatively, one of Kal Penn's most famous roles, as Kumar Patel in the *Harold and Kumar* film trilogy, is such a mainstream American film to star Asian American actors and throughout the course of the film highlight issues of race, ethnicity, and gender identity for Asian Americans<sup>29</sup>. Meanwhile the short-lived television series *Outsourced* provided arguably the largest number of jobs for South Asian Americans in Hollywood of any television series in history yet was the center of controversy for stereotypical caricatures of Indians<sup>30</sup>. While perhaps there is no clear trajectory for where the place of South Asian Americans in Hollywood is going, the first step of representation has been one that has is now at rest.

## Bollywood

Just as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century marked a notable turn in the portrayals of South Asian Americans in American media, so did the new century usher in a bevy of Indian films concerning the lives of the Indian Diaspora, especially in North America and Britain. Before then, films centered on the lives of the Diaspora were rare and Diasporic characters written into the films were often portrayed as villainous due to habits and morals they picked up outside of the subcontinent<sup>31</sup>. In the late 1990's however, a marked change in the perception of Indian Diasporic subjects occurred throughout the major-grossing Hindi film production companies, as films like *Swades* and *Pardees* nuanced the otherwise set narrative of migration from India as bad. The title of this paper reflects the importance these two films signify in this transitional moment in Bollywood's history, as well as the two concepts embodied by these Hindi words.

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<sup>29</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013, 111-126.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 155-156.

<sup>31</sup> Uberoi, P. "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32.2 (1998): 308.

"*Parades*" meaning "foreign country" and "*Swades*" meaning "our own country," are the titles of films that follow the journey of migration for an Indian to America. *Parades*, while depicting Indian American characters who become morally corrupt and disrespectful to "traditional Indian values," also highlights the possibility for transporting Indian culture and morality abroad as portable assets while adapting to life in America<sup>31</sup>. The female protagonist of the film who arrives to the USA as an immigrant bride is viewed as the repository for cultural integrity while away from the motherland, and is aptly named Ganga, after the sacred Ganges River. Across other films, such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, Indian Diasporic women are represented as bearers of tradition, with the role of motherhood as symbolically generative of Indian culture abroad<sup>32</sup>. While for men perhaps this emphasis on maintaining cultural links to India through performative techniques of dress, customs, and religion are less emphasized in Bollywood films set overseas, the presence of the Joint Family as opposed to the Nuclear Family unit is another important marker of how Indian identity is maintained in America, as depicted in *Parades*<sup>32</sup>. *Swades* ultimately advocates for a return to India, a rejection of the concept of the Indian Diasporic identity being viable as similarly portrayed by earlier Bollywood films, yet also doing the work of opposing the "brain drain" of Indian professionals and skilled workers to wealthier nations like America. Instead, *Swades* puts political and cultural citizenship with India first. In *Parades* however, cultural citizenship is what is key to maintaining a *pakka*-Indian identity while political and economic affiliations are deemed less important.

Several trends in South Asian transnational movements around the turn of the millennium would lead to this change in Hindi Film discourse about Diasporic communities.

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<sup>32</sup> Kurien, P. "Gendered Ethnicity: Creating a Hindu Indian Identity in the United States." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42.4 (1999): 648-70.

A political shift in the late 1990's propelled Hindu right-wing politicians to the forefront of India's diplomatic leadership, which also engendered a change in political dialogue with Indian Diasporic communities in North America. The United States' Indian community became a major source of funding for Hindu fundamentalist groups during this time, and rhetoric from the Hindu right about the role of religion and civic engagement with American and Indian politics began to draw more emphasis in strategy for groups affiliated with the Hindu right<sup>33</sup>. While not all the Bollywood films produced in this time period featuring South Asian Diasporic communities had ties to the Hindu right in terms of funding, a wave of conservatism swept the Hindi film industry at this time to centralize the role of religion (specifically North Indian Hinduism, which encompassed the Sikh and Jain religions as essentially variations of Hinduism), family, and patriarchal structures<sup>34</sup>. Especially in the case of films relating to the Diaspora in America or Europe, such films as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, and *Pardees*, the upper-middle class lifestyle of the Indian overseas communities maintained integrity through their reproductions of North Indian Hindu traditions and daily customs, with ideas of assimilation being a subversive plot point usually taken up by the naïve children or a loose younger woman.

Even after the removal of the Hindu right from national governance in India, many of the same trends of portraying a cultural citizenship of Indian Americans by Indian actors and actresses remained a facet of blockbuster Bollywood films. With ever-increasing economic success in overseas markets, many more Bollywood films have featured the Indian American community as the context for their productions, often weaving in themes featuring current events in America or broader issues faced by Indian American families. Such films include

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<sup>33</sup> Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000. 133.

<sup>34</sup> Kurien, P. "Gendered Ethnicity: Creating a Hindu Indian Identity in the United States." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42.4 (1999): 648-70.

*Dostana*, in which two Indian immigrant men pretend to be a gay couple to flout immigration law, *My Name is Khan* and *New York*, which dramatize the discrimination and violence South Asian Americans experienced after 9/11, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, a romantic drama about two couples caught in adultery and the resulting aftermath on their multigenerational families, and perhaps the most famous in terms of profit grossed, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. This last film especially perpetuates the notion of maintaining an Indian cultural citizenship as the most important goal for Indian Americans, and even hints at rejecting an American political affiliation—specifically one poignant scene where the impassioned hero chastises the Indian American family hosting him for forgetting their roots, which is then followed by the family turning their corner side all-American coffee shop into an Indian restaurant, complete with the replacing of an American flag with the Indian tricolor. Ethnographers have noted the social capital Bollywood films have among the Indian American community, especially those Hindi films featuring Diasporic topics, to be influential in the lives of South Asian American youth in terms of views on fashion, religion, family, and race<sup>35</sup>. Many of these aforementioned films featuring the Indian American and British Indian communities have been specifically referenced as important cultural texts for second-generation Indian Americans, yet they prove to be problematic in fitting with dominant American discourses of ethnic identity development when analyzed critically<sup>36</sup>. This study hopes to connect these critiques of Bollywood's portrayal of South Asian Americans to the lived experience of South Asian American second-generation youth by gathering and analyzing data on how these individuals negotiate media images vis-à-vis their daily life.

### **South Asian Diasporic Film**

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<sup>35</sup> Shankar, Shalini. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Maira, Sunaina. *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia, Temple UP, 2002. 92-93.

Due to its considerably smaller pool of texts, as well as often having smaller budgets than the mainstream Bollywood and Hollywood films previously mentioned, South Asian Diasporic Film is a genre perhaps more unknown to the wider South Asian American community, yet it has been critiqued thoroughly by scholars. Filmmakers like Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, and Gurinder Chadha have enjoyed substantial crossover success in various overseas markets for films such as *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Monsoon Wedding*, and *The Namesake*<sup>37</sup>. Most of these higher-earning films originated from a British Asian as opposed to South Asian American context, yet a variety of smaller, independent films created by and featuring South Asian Americans, such as *My Own Country*, *American Desi*, *Green Card Fever*, *Kumaré*, and *Shades of Ray*, have formed a notable body of work that was, for the most part, driven by the creative pursuits of Joshi's hypothesized Second Generation A. Most films of the Diasporic genre are created to examine topics and stories rarely covered by mainstream media sources such as Bollywood and Hollywood. In turn, the very nature of Diasporic films are often predisposed to be critical of systems of race and gender; indeed most of the Diasporic films listed thus far detail stories of South Asian Diasporic individuals navigating the politics of identity on the levels of race, citizenship, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, and class. With these media portrayals available as resources to South Asian American second generation youth, who have been known to struggle through issues of gendered ethnic identity development in their young adulthood, further study is needed to determine how South Asian Diasporic Film is being utilized, if at all, by the youth in learning to negotiate and interpret media images of themselves.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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<sup>37</sup> Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. 166.

## Methodology

Our data collection included responses and oral histories collected from anonymous online surveys and personal interviews respectively. These approaches are commonly used techniques in the field of ethnic studies to gather data. Regarding the formatting of our interview and survey questions, we drew appropriate language and terminology from similar surveys regarding South Asian American ethnic issues, specifically research done by Shalini Shankar, and Shilpa Dave. The goal of recruitment was to obtain a sample representative of second generation South Asian American college students. In order to target this population, recruitment material was sent via social media and South Asian student organizations at The Ohio State University informing potential participants of the survey and interview including constraints that qualify individuals as subjects for our research. Data analysis was primarily qualitative.

The survey questions included questions to ensure the respondents fit these constraints for the target population of the study. To ensure the subjects were second generation South Asian American youth, information regarding race, ethnicity, birthplace, time spent in the United States, and age was obtained. Those subjects that did not correspond to the study's requisites were removed from the data set prior to analysis. Variables to determine gender and sexual identity included gender, sexuality, masculinity and femininity. To examine each media form's influence on the sample, questions were included regarding frequency of consumption, and opinion on the influence and portrayal of South Asian American characters. The purpose of the interviews was to explore in a more detailed and comprehensive manner, the three aspects of media consumption being studied: our subjects' consumption of portrayals of Indian Americans in different genres of media, their perceptions of said media portrayals, and

the influence these have on society. The interview questions were therefore constructed to gather explanations for trends present in data gathered from the surveys.

## **Results**

The survey sample consisted of 14 male and 36 female respondents aged from 18 to 26 years of age. All are 1.5 or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans who have spent a majority of their lives in Midwestern United States and included people of Sri Lankan, Indian, and Pakistani descent. The age group was chosen appropriately as difference in age or year attending college did not correlate to any significant differences in responses. However, subjects who were younger tended to say that media influenced them more often than older subjects. Of the survey sample, four men and three women were interviewed. As discussed later, the combined survey and interview results did not indicate drastic effects of ethnicity on media consumption.

Prior to discussion of media portrayals of South Asian Americans, the interviewees were asked to explain their involvement in South Asian American culture and their perspectives on gender role and cultural identity of South Asian Americans of their age group. All of the interviewed subjects grew up in primarily Caucasian suburban communities that limited their involvement in South Asian American culture to interactions through family, family friends and religious practices. Perhaps religion could be analyzed as a variable in media portrayals and consumption of these portrayals, though only one interviewee based their opinion on media portrayals on religion. Some also indicated involvement in performance arts as a medium for direct interaction with other South Asian Americans and South Asian culture. All of the interviewees mentioned their parents playing the principal role in building their cultural identity including their media consumption. The subjects also have consumed Hollywood films, American television shows, and Bollywood films.



The subjects identified similar patterns and issues in gender roles and cultural identity that are faced by South Asian American youth subjects. They based gender roles and norms on roles played in family and/or along the lines of physical attractiveness. They all established that, though different roles are expected from men and women, youth in the community are pressured to succeed with emphasis on a patriarchal family structure. For men, this success comes from professional and monetary success that helps them fulfill their role in providing for the family, whereas women are expected to care for the household and family. These notions are, however, changing. A majority (5 of 7) argued that 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asians are more egalitarian in gender roles, though the emphasis on male bread-winner and career women that are only successful if they can manage their household is still prevalent. The overlying issue affecting their peers the interviewees mentioned is finding and maintaining a balance between South Asian expectations and American expectations in order to develop an ideal South Asian American identity. With an emphasis on familial values, Hari, a second generation Indian American male, that he once heard his parents and their friends discussing how they felt inadequately prepared to guide their children through their lives as they had not experienced growing up in the United States. Communication and cultural gaps such as these may contribute to the personal and social differences and issues that arise. Hari was also one of several (4 of 7) to bring up that in order to go against or along with these societal and familial expectations, South Asian American youths prefer to establish themselves as a certain race, American or South Asian, over the other.

### **Bollywood**

Though 66% of the survey sample watches Bollywood once a month or less frequently, 67% of the subjects (80% of men and 60% of women) agreed that it was influential on South Asian Americans. Fewer people believed Bollywood to be influential on their own lives. 53%

of men think Bollywood films are influential on their lives whereas 50% of women disagreed that Bollywood film was influential on their lives. After interactions with others of South Asian descent, and religion, interviewees mentioned Bollywood most frequently (5 of 7) as a way of connecting with South Asian culture.

Hari was one that did not believe Indian mainstream media was influential on him but thought that South Asian Americans who had not lived or travelled in their homeland had only Bollywood films to demonstrate what South Asian culture and quotidian life was like. Katy, a second generation Malayali Indian American woman, said that Bollywood films are consumed by her and her peers simply for the novelty of it, and that the portrayal of South Asian American life is “too ridiculous” to take seriously because the films seem that unrealistic to her. Amneet, a 1.5 generation Punjabi woman from a Hindu and Sikh family, mentioned that Bollywood is a nostalgic way for her “to keep in touch with culture back home.” However, she also mentions that the films realistically display only some aspects of South Asian culture and can be misleading to those who have experienced South Asia firsthand, especially when it comes to South Asian women.

Many of the survey subjects would agree with Amneet. Eighty-two percent said that they believed that Bollywood’s portrayal of South Asian Americans is unrealistic. This number varies greatly depending on gender of the respondent: 91% of women, but 53% of men mentioned that the portrayal was unrealistic. Similarly, women were more likely than men to say that Bollywood’s portrayal of each gender was negative, and both genders believed Bollywood’s portrayal of men to be more positive than that of women. This might take root in the patriarchal structure of South Asian society. Prem, a second generation Indian male, mentioned that the diaspora is depicted either as “white-washed” with a negative connotation or “completely still in touch with their roots” with a positive connotation. These characters

reinforce the struggle that the demographic has balancing their two cultures. Gender roles overall are seen by the interviewees to demonstrate the male protagonist as the masculine hero, while women are there in supporting roles.

Amneet noted that women are present in these films are often objectified and sometimes serve the sole purpose of sex appeal. Katy explained that South Asian American women were displayed as corrupt. For example, in the movie *Cocktail* (2012), the male protagonist has a sexual relationship with a diasporic woman who is portrayed as sexually liberated. Her liberation is put in a dark light, depicting her as promiscuous and immoral. At the end of the film, the man chooses a chaster, “more Indian” girl. Katy believes this instance implies a double standard for men to be sexually liberated and expect “a virginal, homely woman waiting to marry them.” Contrastingly, Shamas, an openly gay Pakistani American that grew up Muslim, found that the Bollywood films that he enjoys to watch actually portray a conservative, traditional culture and therefore felt that the South Asian American community would not be accepting of him as a result of his sexuality. As a result he felt isolated and avoided interacting with others of his race outside of family.

### **Hollywood and American Television**

This type of visual media is most commonly consumed by the subjects in this study: 48% watch Hollywood films at least monthly and 73% watch American television multiple times a week. 74% think the portrayal in American visual media of South Asian Americans is influential on South Asian American society, though 81% believe is unrealistic. As with Bollywood films, men are more likely than women to agree that these portrayals are influential on their own lives however 67% of the sample believes that the portrayals are influential on themselves. In contrast to Bollywood films, South Asian American female portrayal in American visual media is perceived as negative by 43% of respondents and 57%

perceived male portrayal as negative. None of the male respondents believed that male gender roles of the diaspora were positive.

The interviewees mentioned that South Asian American characters in American media serve the purpose of comedic relief or, as Amneet said, “As the butt of every joke.” Every subject mentioned the Big Bang Theory character Raj as an example of a South Asian American character and explained how American social media depicts a stereotype of nerdy, socially inept men. None of them indicated that they believed the rationale behind this depiction was Orientalist or to provide contrast to the White male. Prem noted that he believed that South Asian American women are also depicted as nerdy and unattractive. “For most of my life my American friends have said they’ve never seen an attractive Indian woman,” but these notions are changing. Four other interviewees agree with him that portrayals are becoming decreasingly negative. Amneet and Hari also mentioned some celebrities such as Deepak Chopra and Miss America Nina Davuluri as a part of a more positive South Asian American presence in American visual media. Hari mentioned that some positive portrayal comes from American media portrayals misinforms mainstream American society where people who are not knowledgeable or aware of South Asian American culture begin to analyze the diaspora superficially.

They feel confident in their level of knowledge of South Asian American culture, which may or may not be true, but in the majority of cases it is not. I think that there is enough media out there that mainstream American society has a lot of exposure to South Asian culture, and because of that they feel they have a grasp on it. A lot of people have this awe with the dance, music, arts that are associated with Indian culture. Sometimes that can be frustrating that they are limited to that since there is all that information out there about South Asian American culture. People don’t even

bother getting involved in other fields such as medicine or religion. I think that television and film really control that perception and it's not a very balanced view. He gives an example of how positive superficial portrayals may be harmful as they do not cover the scope of the group being portrayed. Furthermore, positive portrayals that misinform a general society may create generalized expectations.

In fact, the biggest concerns amongst the interviewees in regard to American visual media were their effect on mainstream American society and, as a result, the battle it creates against stereotypes. Several mentioned how South Asian Americans try to denounce the stereotypes by either acting very much like one race or another. On the other hand, Sudhir, a second generation Indian American, identifies with the newer characters such as Kumar in the Harold and Kumar trilogy. Once again, we see the struggle to balance between maintaining one's ethnic identity and being accepted as a part of American society. Most of the interviewees mentioned the model minority stereotype that is often portrayed. Shamas contrasted their opinions by saying he welcomed the portrayal of South Asian Americans as professionals as a manner of breaking the terrorist stereotype that is generalized to people that practice the religion of Islam. He also mentioned that simply having the presence of South Asian Americans acknowledged through these characters is a positive for the diaspora. He also mentioned the mosque that his family attends in Dallas, Texas is currently working on an initiative for more representation of South Asians, Pakistanis, and Muslims in American film and television as a way to address stereotypes of these demographics.

### **South Asian Diasporic Film**

Diasporic film was the least viewed and known area of visual media discussed. 90% of the survey respondents said they consumed diasporic visual media less than once a month or never. It is reasonable then that the responses to survey questions were more neutral

compared to American or Bollywood portrayals. In regard to the influence of diasporic film on both South Asian America and on their own lives, about 50% were neutral responses. On the other hand, 80% of the respondents said that diasporic film has realistic portrayals of South Asian American film and 20% said the portrayals are unrealistic. People were more likely to believe diasporic film had positive portrayals of South Asian Americans and gender roles within the demographic; however the differences between the two were not significant. Men in this study were more likely than women to consume diasporic media, and to think its portrayal of South Asian Americans and gender roles are positive. All of the interviewees had seen some popular diasporic films such as *Band It Like Beckham*, and some of the genre-bending visual media, especially *The Mindy Project* and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*. This indicates that there may have been confusion for survey respondents as to what may fall under diasporic media.

Since diasporic media does not target mainstream society in neither South Asia nor America, it is not funded or profitable as mainstream media. Therefore, this genre has weaker dispersion and influence on the diaspora. Even though many South Asian Americans find diasporic film to have more realistic portrayals of themselves, there did not seem to be an overwhelming feeling amongst the interviewees of supporting or watching more of it. When the films are seen, their lack of popularity in mainstream society diminishes their impact on the viewers.

After what diasporic media entails was clarified to interviewees, however, their opinions followed the general trend of the survey responses. Most thought that the portrayal of South Asian Americans was positive. Five of the respondents believed the films and shows addressed issues of culture identity and of the gap between first generation immigrants and their children. The two that found them to be unrealistic explained that their families did not

fit the norm of South Asian American families, and therefore believed that the stereotypes are exaggerated. Katy mentioned that watching the characters in *Bend It Like Beckham* navigating through what they want to be and what is expected of them and being Indian or Western resonated with her as she too went through a phase of navigating her own cultural identity. Those (5 of 7) that saw *The Mindy Project* had similarly positive reactions. They appreciated that there was an independent South Asian American woman in control of her own life. However Sudhir and Katy mentioned that the character Mindy Lahiri seemed to be doing so at the cost of her “Indian-ness.”

## CONCLUSION

While other ethnographic works relating to Indian Americans, such as Shalini Shankar’s *Desi Land* and Sunaina Maira’s *Desis in the House* have demonstrated the enormous cultural capital Bollywood and some South Asian Diasporic films have in the formation of Indian American second-generation culture and cultural products (such as fashion, speech, and behaviors), our study sought to definitively find links in the gendered portrayals of South Asian Americans and how South Asian American youth negotiated their own gendered ethnic identities. Being the first study to monitor the media consumption patterns of South Asian American second-generation youth in respect to Bollywood, Hollywood, and South Asian Diasporic film, it is clear from the survey and interview findings of the influence Bollywood and Hollywood play in how South Asian Americans understand South Asian American ethnicity and gender roles from American and Indian contexts. Critical analyses of the three media types were mostly supported by the data collected on South Asian American perspectives of media portrayals of themselves, most notably the lack of agency for women and heteropatriarchy in Bollywood, the emasculation of South Asian American men in

Hollywood, and the general exoticization and otherness ascribed to South Asians in American film and television. The lack of engagement with South Asian Diasporic Films understandably led to some ambivalence on opinions of this genre of film, but the slight trends towards Diasporic Film as being “more realistic” and having more positive portrayals of women affirm scholarly analyses of these genres. The results of this study in no means can be extrapolated to be fully inclusive of all South Asian American second-generation youth, especially given such factors as the lack of non-Indian South Asians, the lack of non-college students, the lack of LGBTQIA identified individuals, and the Midwestern regional affiliation of the participants. However, the unique perspectives of the South Asian Americans involved demonstrate that these individuals are critically navigating portrayals of themselves by rejecting negative, oppressive representations (of racism or sexism) of South Asian Americans in Hollywood and Bollywood, while recognizing the potential for less problematic portrayals of themselves in media generated by other South Asian Americans. Even with these perspectives however, our research participants continue to imbibe problematic images of themselves, with only one interviewee expressing a desire to seek out Diasporic Film as an alternative to the racism and sexism that pervade other portrayals of South Asian America.



## Annotated Bibliography

Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. N.p.: University of Illinois, 2013. Print.

“Indian Accents” is a breakthrough work in exploring Asian Americans in American media, theorizing how “brown voice” colors every aspect of how the South Asian other is depicted in American film & television. Mostly citing the few examples of South Asian portrayals pre-2000, Dave explores the practice of “brownface” in conversation with notable critiques of blackface, as well as several popular yet stereotypical South Asian television/film characters to explore how tropes such as the perpetual foreigner, model minority, and exotic oriental play out across mainstream media. The politics of belonging, national origin and cultural citizenship, and the place of South Asians in America’s racial spectrum are frequent topics of debate, which Dave ties together in her analysis of the pan-Asian buddy film series, “Harold & Kumar,” to explore how South Asian Americans in the media are now creating agency and voice for a new type of South Asian portrayal.

Shilpa Davé’s work was central to the formation of our thesis as it is currently the only full-length text studying South Asian American media portrayals. While most of her film/television analysis is on events that have less cultural impact on the generation we are studying, her book provides a framework of how to do media analysis in relation to the affect of South Asian media portrayals per the South Asian American community. Differing in her approach of placing her study of South Asian Americans under the larger Asian American experience, we are interested in seeing how our research subjects reject or accept this racial category in relation to their experience with film.

Joshi, Khyati Y. *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race, and Ethnicity in Indian America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2006. Print.

Khyati Joshi explores the much-understudied population of the Indian American community in Dixie, specifically along the lines of race, religion, and ethnicity. She postulates that Indian America, much like the White ethnics of the late nineteenth century, are in a transitional period of ethnic formation that could lead to their subsumal into White identity or ethnic solidarity movements to mirror the Asian American movement of the Civil Rights Era. Part of this ethnic identification process involves religious identity for South Asians, as she argues that the understanding of religious identity for South Asians/South Asian Americans is more conflated with ethnicity than for other ethnic groups in America. Lastly, this ties into how South Asian Americans experience race, as their current racial difference from White America also signifies otherness in religion, even when this is not the case.

One of Joshi’s main points of how ethnoreligious identities function for South Asian Americans is something we include in how we examine our research subjects to, if for no other reason, monitor patterns across religious identification. What proves useful from her study to our research are moreso her methodologies of interviews, which we heavily borrowed from. Central to our paper however, is Joshi’s theory of the second-generations A & B. In the post-1965 wave of immigration from India, Joshi argues that those born in America before 1985 form a first wave of the second-generation, A, and those after are B. While perhaps generation C has been born around the year 2000, for our intensive purposes the focus on the

second generation B in the college scene, limiting our subject pool to a certain age group, was necessary from some limitation on the study.

Maira, Sunaina. *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia Temple UP, 2002. Print.

A comprehensive ethnography of Indian American youth life & culture in New York City of the early 2000's, Maira's work is often paired with Shankar's "Desi Land" as prime examples of understanding the South Asian American second-generation. Slightly more up to date given its post-9/11 framework, it explores the transnational connections of the Indian American youth culture under observation, and how cultural productions and spaces (everything from Bhangra music to college campuses) are formed, interrogated, and remodeled in response to dominant and subaltern discourses on ethnicity and belonging. Maira specifically focuses on how individuals negotiate gender roles and expectations in different cultural spaces, class mobility in relation to their model minority status, and race relations to mainstream White America and Urban Black America through music, fashion, and performative identity.

Maira's book is well-known among South Asian American circles for its relevance and comprehensive focus on Indian American college youth culture, albeit now about a decade old and very centered in the East Coast. However, given the Midwest's smaller numbers of Desis, the social setting studied in "Desis in the House" is quite similar to our field of participants and many codes of dialogue and issues that youth navigate (in respect to gender and class) are relevant to the observations of our study. Many cultural texts (Hollywood, Bollywood, and Diasporic film) that we pull from are reported throughout Maira's work as important to the second-generation Indian American population.

Mani, Bakirathi. *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012. Print.

Baki Mani postulates in her "Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America" that South Asian Americans form community identity not through ethnic solidarity movements like those of Asian Americans, but through stratagems complicit with racist multicultural frameworks and dominant discourses on colorblindness. As postcolonial and neoliberal subjects, Mani explores how in a variety of cultural and literary texts of the Diaspora, specifically the works of Jhumpa Lahiri & Mira Nair, as well as the play "Bombay Dreams" and public events such as India-related festivals and South Asian American beauty pageants, the politics of belonging are played out, and how a so-called "South Asian" identity is created, managed, negotiated, and rejected by its subjects.

"Aspiring to Home" does study several Diasporic South Asian film, unfortunately none directly related to our research, but the analysis of its impact and the influence of other Diasporic cultural works (beauty pageants, books, etc) do provide some basis for analyzing similar strategies across the visual media we are studying and gives us expectations of potential answers of our research participants based on the influences Mani hypothesizes these cultural texts have. The politics of belonging and communal identity forging is something that factors heavily with how research participants will identify/dis-identify with our study and nature of our work.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000. Print.

"The Karma of Brown Folk" is Vijay Prashad's radical call to South Asian Americans to resist the complicity of racism and the rise Hindu religious fundamentalist movement in India that took place in the 1990's. Prashad attacks the "model minority" myth that affects Asian Americans, as well as "New Age Orientalism" perpetuated by notable Indian American figures. Detailing accounts of South Asian activists in and outside of the subcontinent, Prashad demonstrates the necessity and ability South Asian America has to resist neocolonial projects and South Asian American complicity in oppressive structures.

Vijay Prashad, one of the most well-known South Asian American activists, is highly respected and controversial for his strongly worded and radical take on race, economy, and religion. While Prashad deals little with the role popular Indian and American film play in affecting social consciousness and politics, his arguments concerning how news media was/is biased during the rise of Hindutva or to perpetuate stereotypes of South Asians as the model minority or perpetual foreigner can apply to how mainstream Hollywood/Bollywood ties South Asian American identity to South Asian and/or American spaces. Gendered ethnicity is played out in dialectic contexts of the masculinity of Hindu, North Indian identity being packaged to the Diaspora, and a feminized, emasculated, exotic Other of American discourse on South Asia/South Asians.

Prashad, Vijay. *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today*. New York: New, 2012. Print.

Prashad's brief follow-up to his "Karma of Brown Folk," this extended essay is meant to update Prashad's arguments for South Asian American radicalism in a post-9/11 world. Starting from community reactions and organizing in the face of racist violence against Sikh, Muslim, and generally other South Asian/Middle Eastern/North African communities in the USA, Prashad uses the image of a perverted Uncle Sam, the "Uncle Swami," to explore how the myths of the New Age Oriental and the Model Minority are continuing to be challenged, reinterpreted, and rejected by South Asians while American military imperializes South Asia. Prashad explores the negotiation South Asian Americans enact with ethnic solidarity movements, ties to nation-state/religion, and coalition building with other groups to become complicit with national and global racist practices enacted by the USA. Concluding the book, Prashad even begins to take apart the imagined community of South Asians, Desis, as a means to free the hurting community from harmful policies and dialogues.

Much like "Karma of Brown Folk," "Uncle Swami" explores how political policies and dominant discourses on South Asians affect coalition building and identity politics in South Asian America. While perhaps focusing less on the role of media's influence in these topics, as well as issues of gender and ethnicity, given the tome's more updated status as a retrospective on the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one marked in America by the tragedy of 9/11, causes good reason for this text to be referenced in how activism affects the target population of our study: South Asian American youth born after 1985.

Punathambekar, A. "Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a Transitive Logic of Cultural Citizenship." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8.2 (2005): 151-73. Print.

Focusing on the blockbuster Hindi film, “Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham,” Punathambekar examines how this one landmark cultural text symbolizes a variety of political and social projects in the South Asian Diaspora. The film in study, abbreviated as K3G, is represented as a transitive moment in India’s relationship with its, especially American, Diaspora, as the film made enormous profits overseas and left a strong cultural impact for films to come. Emotional family drama at the center of the film reinforces ties to nation-state and unquestioning loyalty to an upper-class, Hindu Brahminical identity as wholly Indian, while managing modernity in an inter-caste marriage and exploring life in the British Asian community.

K3G is undeniably one of the most important cultural texts of the Indian American community, especially of the target population of our study. While set mostly in Britain’s Indian Diasporic community, the messages the film portrays of Diasporic identity, cultural nationalism, and the compulsions of ethnicity are frequently used in discourse among South Asian American youth culture, especially in ethnic communal organizing complicit with multiculturalism. While only one film out of many that impact South Asian American youth culture, K3G is unable to be left out.

Rastogi, Nina. "Aziz Ansari, Mindy Kaling, and the Sudden Rise of Indians on Television." *Slate Magazine*. N.p., June 2010. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

From the popular online magazine, *Slate*, writer Nina Rastogi examines the apparent rise in South Asians on American mainstream television in the late 2000’s. Rastogi gives personal anecdotes of the experiences of South Asian American 1.5/second-generation youth in having South Asian figures portrayed in the American media during childhood to the experience now, where many more South Asians appear in television and film, albeit in side roles. Summarizing racial barriers that previously hindered actors of color from starring in American television, Rastogi comments hopefully on the continued success of South Asian Americans making a claim to cultural citizenship in America.

Due to the lack of scholarly commentary on the recent rise of South Asians on American television, this popular article is helpful for our study by providing basis for the observations of our study participants in the effects that increased portrayals of South Asian Americans has had on their personal lives. Rastogi does briefly reference gendered ethnic stereotypes that still persist in American television regarding South Asians, which may be a helpful reference point for our study.

Shankar, Shalini. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. Print.

A landmark work in the study of South Asian American daily life, Shalini Shankar’s “Desi Land” is an ethnography of the South Asian American community in Silicon Valley, California, at the height of the IT boom in the late 1990’s. Shankar specifically explores youth culture and community identity and organization at several local high schools with large numbers of Indian Americans, and examines the dynamics of religion, class, and citizenship-status on the social life of Desi youth. Shankar spends an extended time on the concept of “Desi” and how this umbrella term that familiarizes South Asians into an imagined community is commonly employed throughout her subjects of study.

Besides being a “must-read” for those doing research on South Asian American youth, Shankar’s framework of analysis and methodology proved most helpful for our study. We pulled much of our interviewing technique and surveys directly from her study, and modified the language to fit our present timeframe and area of study. Given the more comprehensive approach to life and her expansive study that spanned several years, much of our sampling of questions came from specific interviews rather than her overall research approach, although investigating the mindset of Shankar in her research as a member of the in-group was also helpful in approaching our target population.

Uberoi, P. "The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32.2 (1998): 305-36. Print.

Two popular Hindi films focusing on Diasporic families, “Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge,” & “Pardes” examine how Indian cultural and political identity are affected by migration abroad. Uberoi theorizes that the former treats “Indian cultural values” as discrete, transportable assets of the Diaspora while “Pardes” treats migration as a process of assimilation to White America for South Asian Americans. The article does an extended analysis of how gender roles are enacted and performed in both films to demonstrate certain discursive nation-cultural ties while overseas from India, and how heteropatriarchy and cultural nationalism are reinforced through dramatic performance.

Both “DDLJ” and “Pardes” have become iconic films for South Asian American second-generation youth that harkens to circles of fictive kinship with other Desis and an imagined homeland for Diasporic subjects. Uberoi’s work critically examines two cultural texts that are immensely influential for the South Asian American community that we intend on studying, and provides the socio-political effects the films have. In addition to “Pardes” and “DDLJ,” another film that is central to our paper, “Swades,” does fall into a similar theme portrayed through these turn-of-the-century Diasporic-centered Bollywood films.

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